

Division 26: School Curriculum and Standards Authority, \$36 756 000 —

Mr I.C. Blayney, Chairman.

Mrs L.M. Harvey, Minister for Police representing the Minister for Education.

Mr A. Blagaich, Chief Executive Officer.

Mrs J. Nairn, Director, Corporate Services.

Ms J. Healy, Director, Policy and Planning.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day.

It is the intention of the Chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to the discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. It will greatly assist Hansard if members can give these details in preface to their question.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information she agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by Friday, 3 June 2016. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice with the Clerk's office.

I give the call to the member for Armadale.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I refer the minister to the first dot point under the heading "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency" on page 284. We went over this issue earlier today, but this is the right division in which to raise it. As a result of the introduction of the new online literacy and numeracy assessment requirement, will that mean that students who have an intellectual disability and do not succeed in or pass the OLN requirement will not graduate?

Mr A. Blagaich: One of the important points that was added in the construction of the new Western Australian Certificate of Education reforms was to make sure that the standards of literacy and numeracy are clearly explicated. Students have to complete two parts of the WACE. They have to complete course enrolment work, so they need to take some list A subjects, which are the humanities, and some list B subjects, which are the sciences and quantitative sciences. English is in list A. Not all students in Western Australia are required to complete a mathematics course in years 11 and 12; therefore, there is a necessity to be able to explain whether a student has met a numeracy standard. In addition to completing courses definitely in English, and also in list B subjects, students have to demonstrate that they have met the minimum literacy and numeracy standards through their achievement in the National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy in year 9, and the benchmark we use is band 8; or, if they have not met that benchmark by year 10, we introduce the online literacy and numeracy assessment, which gives students in years 10, 11 and 12 the opportunity to demonstrate that they have come up to that standard.

The member's question was about students with a disability. The question really has to be: what will all students in Western Australia receive? Every student will receive a statement of student achievement. That statement will outline what they have completed. However, to receive the WACE, they need to meet a number of requirements, one of which is performance in literacy and numeracy, so OLN. Second, they must get a certain number of Cs in years 11 and 12. That combination ticks over whether they receive the WACE. OLN is not the only thing that determines whether a student achieves the WACE in the future.

[5.30 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: If students do not pass the OLN, they cannot graduate.

Mr A. Blagaich: That is correct.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I suppose my next question is more to the minister. She may want to defer it; I am not sure. Until this requirement came into place, I understand that many students with intellectual disabilities were graduating. It was a great occasion for these students and their parents. Unless something else has been put in place to allow them to graduate, these students and their parents no longer have that opportunity. I really believe that causes real damage to those kids and their parents. Because of this requirement, which is a reasonable

requirement overall, we have not considered what effect it has on these students who want to come to school and work really, really hard but unfortunately, due to their disabilities, will never be able to graduate.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I understand that Mr Blagaich has a response that he would like to provide.

Mr A. Blagaich: We have spoken to many schools about this, particularly schools in the member's electorate, where it was mentioned that students who have completed years 11 and 12 come to graduation ceremonies, often for the first time for many of those families. The issue around graduation is that we have said that that is a term that schools can and should continue to achieve. Achievement of WACE is a separate part of that. We have said that all students can graduate from years 11 and 12 according to the criteria that the school sets. All students will receive a Western Australian statement of student achievement, which outlines what they have achieved. The WACE then becomes something, as the member said, that has a measure in it. That can be achieved over a lifetime. Many students, particularly with disability, who may perhaps end up in TAFE doing a certificate II or certificate I will be given the opportunity to enrol in programs in which they get supplementary work on literacy and numeracy. The achievement of WACE may come later for them if they have met all those other requirements, not just the OLNA. I acknowledge the point that the member is raising. The WACE becomes something that can be achieved over a lifetime. We have received the funding to be able to set up our student records system, which will maintain records for life. They can come back if they have demonstrated that they have met that standard for literacy and numeracy whilst at TAFE. Those opportunities will be explored by the board to be able to tick off the WACE requirement for the OLNA.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Surely it would have been possible in this system, when this requirement was devised, for there to be an exemption for certain students who have a certain intellectual disability. To receive disability benefits, one has to be able to show that one has a certain recognised disability et cetera. I just do not see how this was not considered. I understand all the things that Mr Blagaich is saying; he speaks with a lot of empathy. I can understand that and I appreciate that. It is still not the same thing. Up to now, these students have joined their parents and received this acknowledgement. As the minister would know, I had an education support centre in my area—at Armadale Senior High School. The joy experienced by those students and their parents will not be the same now.

Mr A. Blagaich: I acknowledge the point that the member is making. In fact, the board was really careful to take consideration of the fact that all students should receive something in Western Australia, and it was for this very issue. A lot of pressure was put on the board and the government to ensure that a standard of literacy and numeracy was explicit in the new WACE, and that we were absolutely clear, particularly around numeracy, which did not exist because mathematics is not a compulsory subject in years 11 and 12. The board carefully looked at what it could do to make sure that all kids get something. That is why the Western Australian statement of student achievement was introduced so that schools could still provide an opportunity to recognise student achievement at the end of year 12 with something that the state provides to them. I think they were really careful in making sure that it is not a closed door at the end of year 12 because it will take many of these kids a long time to get there.

We have also put into place some courses that should assist kids—for example, kids in ED support units et cetera. We have preliminary units that assist students to engage in the curriculum. We have also gone further and introduced Abilities Based Learning Education WA, which provides opportunities for students to access curriculum, even kids with severe disability, all the way through to year 12, so it is not year restricted but students basically graduate according to their needs.

I acknowledge that the achievement of a WACE may not be there but all students will be able to receive a statement that the state provides to them, which explains to them what they have managed to achieve, and they can then carry that with them to further training.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I do not know if this was mentioned, but is consideration also given to students for whom English is a second language?

Mr A. Blagaich: Opportunities are provided for those students. Depending on how long they have been in Australia, they have an exemption from kicking in to having to participate in the OLNA. If a student, for example, is at an intensive English centre, they are exempt until they are out of that intensive English centre. We have courses in years 11 and 12 at three levels for students with English as a second language or dialect. They can engage in English as a foundation unit. The standard is certainly below that of a general unit. We have general, which is non-examinable courses, and then Australian tertiary admission rank English as an additional language or dialect, so kids from non-English speaking backgrounds can kick into it at different levels. We are also currently looking at allowing additional time. The board is going to consider allowing students additional working time for the OLNA to take into consideration the fact that some students for whom English is a second language take longer to read. They are able to engage but they take longer to read.

However, there is no stepping back from the fact that there is still a minimum standard and it sits in that year 9 NAPLAN standard, which has been determined to be where performance for a certificate II sits in relation to training and TAFE.

Mr N.W. MORTON: I have listened to the responses of Mr Blagaich. I am not sure that his response to me will be any different, through the minister. I also have questions relating to the OLN A testing. I am not sure whether Mr Blagaich was present earlier but I raised the situation of kids at one of my local schools. These kids are mainstream students. They suffer from dyslexia. Both students are in year 12, obviously wishing to graduate and achieve WACE. My recollection is that one of the students was the highest achieving English student in the previous year, year 11. I know they get extra time to do the OLN A testing and all that sort of stuff, but in mainstream English classes they are demonstrating their capacity and literacy skills but are incapable of achieving a pass in the OLN A due to their disability. Is there some possibility for consideration to be given to these students to receive the WACE given that they are meeting the requirements of the coursework in mainstream general English? I am not sure that the response would be any different but I am compelled to put that on the record anyway.

[5.40 pm]

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Mr Blagaich has said that he can clarify some points.

Mr A. Blagaich: When students receive a pass, or better—in this instance—in a general English course, that tests the content of that syllabus. It is an English syllabus that is broader than something that focuses specifically on literacy skills. The online literacy and numeracy assessment in its construct is very much about the language that you and I need to survive in the everyday world—being able to read signs and make determinations around timetables et cetera. The construct of the reading component focuses on that kind of work. In the writing component, it is about being able to respond to something in a prescribed time even with an adjustment for disability, and looking carefully at things like demonstrating an understanding of audience, structuring and organising their argument, making the vocabulary appropriate to whatever they are writing about, and using the correct sentence structure, punctuation and spelling. English teachers look for a lot of those things, but not always in every assessment. It figures in part of the assessment, which is what the OLN A is about—that is, whether a student can respond to a stimulus and get those things under control in a specified amount of time. The Western Australian Certificate of Education requires both parts, including the completion. In this case, the student has done very well in her general course. She also has to demonstrate, for the purposes of the state, that she can do the work in a set time and show the specific skills that are required of writing. Will there be an exemption? At this stage, no; it is not considered. The construct of WACE is such that a student has to do this and that, not this or that. That is the status as it currently stands.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Just to add to that, we should not lose sight of the improvements that have come into the system since the introduction of this assessment.

Mr N.W. MORTON: I am in agreement with the principle.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: When we look at the results, 81.69 per cent of year 12 students have now demonstrated the numeracy standard, which is a 16.3 per cent increase from when they were in year 10. The reading standard was demonstrated by 84.9 per cent of year 12 students, which is an increase of 14.4 per cent from when they were in year 10, and 83 per cent of year 12 students have demonstrated the writing standard, which is a 16.4 per cent increase from when they were in year 10. Clearly the introduction of this requirement has led to students taking steps to improve their literacy and numeracy in order to achieve WACE, which was the intention, notwithstanding that further work will obviously be required with particular groups that may need more assistance. However, those figures are very good and show that it has been a significant reform. It was a difficult reform to implement but the results are clearly showing an improvement.

Ms S.F. MCGURK: My question also relates to OLN A. This same issue came up earlier when the Department of Education was here. Have any issues been raised about the internet capacity at schools, which has made it difficult to deliver OLN A; and, if so, can the minister please list the schools at which that has been an issue? I have certainly been getting feedback about that issue.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Thank you. Mr Blagaich will respond.

Mr A. Blagaich: Although the program we are using is light in terms of its application at schools, after the initial introduction when the current year 12s were in year 10, issues emerged through the schools. Many of the schools have been able to sort that out. The two issues are bandwidth and the technical use of the system within the school. In the last round, only 10 schools needed specific work tied up with their technical issues, and three schools had bandwidth issues, which I understand is being worked on by both the public school system and the Catholic school system. In many instances schools are able to manage their usage issues by simply getting other kids in the school to come off their programs. If an individual student has had an issue, we have been able to

make an adjustment to the student's results to take into consideration what has happened. Essentially the issues are being well handled by the schools through their own methods, such as minimising the usage by other students or staff. We have made sure that the software we have put through to run the online literacy and numeracy assessment does not impact heavily or eat up as much bandwidth. It is being well managed by the schools.

Ms S.F. McGURK: The issue about internet access was raised in the previous division, so it is not necessarily a curriculum issue. However, that is not the feedback I am getting from my electorate. I do not know whether bandwidth or connectivity is the problem, but it is a big issue for schools. It is really restricting the capacity for schools to fully utilise the online learning opportunities, as we do in government, business and throughout the rest of the community.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I have two teenagers and I am well aware of problems with internet access. It creates significant headaches for me at home. In the previous division, the Department of Education elaborated on the spend to assist schools that are experiencing difficulties by expanding access to the internet and bandwidth. With respect to the division in front of us now, if the member is aware of any specific schools that have a problem with the online testing for OLN as a result of those issues, it is very important that they contact the Department of Education Services so that some adjustments and provisions can be made for those students so that they are not disadvantaged by the fact that their infrastructure requirements with ICT may not support their participation in OLN. I expect that most schools are aware that they can make that complaint or make that issue known so that that part of the budget allocation that is set aside for the improvement of internet accessibility in schools can be allocated to the schools that are experiencing that problem.

The CHAIRMAN: I am aware that time is ticking away and there may be members who want to ask about country hostels.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not think there are any questions on country hostels.

The CHAIRMAN: I thought the member for Moore might have some questions about hostels.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I have one very quick question under this division. I refer to curriculum development, evaluation and support at page 286. This question is drawing a bit of a long bow but I will ask it anyway. Has any thought been given to introducing a safe-driving curriculum for senior students, particularly as a way of reducing fatalities in country areas?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: As the Minister for Road Safety, I can say that we fund the School Drug Education and Road Aware program to provide road safety awareness in schools. Certainly a range of programs around driver education are available in schools. I am not aware of any moves for that to become part of the curriculum as a test. However, Mr Blagaich might elaborate.

Mr A. Blagaich: I know that schools allow access to the SDERA program, particularly when students in years 11 and 12 may have come down a subject, for example. That happens in some schools and they have been able to put on that program and provide access to it. However, we make sure that in the curriculum for the P-10 space there is a clear line that talks about health and safety values in the physical education side of the documentation, so we do focus on that role of road safety and good practice. However, at this stage it will probably not be a set part of the year 11 and 12 curriculum.

The appropriation was recommended.

[5.50 pm]